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A Reverse Flow of Supplies — to Cuba

The Reagan administration has made no secret of its belief that Nicaragua is transshipping Soviet armaments from Cuba to the leftist guerrillas in El Salvador.

What has not been made public, though, is the evidence our intelligence agencies have gathered of a reverse flow of nonmilitary supplies from Nicaragua to Cuba. As with the military smuggling, the Nicaraguans are the middlemen, but this pipeline runs from the United States to Nicaragua to Cuba.

Despite the 20-year U.S. economic boycott of Cuba, it is possible once again to buy goods in Havana bearing the label "Made in U.S.A." Intelligence analysts have concluded that the U.S. boycott is being circumvented by using Nicaragua as a clearinghouse for American goods Fidel Castro badly needs.

For example, one U.S. company has sold huge quantities of agricultural chemicals to Cuba through the Nicaragua connection. In some cases, my sources say, the shipments have not even been offloaded in Nicaragua, where the cargo vessels simply touched port briefly before shoving off for Cuba.

Still other American companies have acted in good faith, but are becoming suspicious that the goods sold to Nicaragua were actually intended for transshipment to Castro. One tire manufacturer, for example, has sold

Nicaragua tires that do not fit any trucks known to be in use in that country. The tires, however, will fit Soviet-made trucks the Cubans have.

Intelligence sources told my associates Dale Van Atta and Bob Sherman that U.S.-made farm machinery shipped to Nicaragua is also ending up in Cuba. The machinery goes to Castro, while Soviet machinery provided to Cuba is delivered to Nicaragua.

Drug companies are apparently major profiteers in the illegal breach of the Cuban boycott. Intelligence sources indicate that some drug makers are afraid the U.S. government will impose civil or even criminal sanctions for pharmaceutical shipments to Nicaragua that could not by any stretch of the imagination be used only within that country.

Reagan aides have the intelligence reports in hand, and are reportedly using them in the development of overall Nicaraguan policy. A final decision on resumption or termination of U.S. economic aid to the Nicaraguan junta is expected soon.

Meanwhile, other intelligence reports have described the Nicaraguan leadership's communist connections. Nicaraguan interior minister Tomas Borge, who is close to Castro, has been seeking aid from other foreign leftists.

For example, last April Borge made a secret visit to North Korea to ar-

range arms shipments to Nicaragua. The meeting was set up through Borge's ties to the Palestine Liberation Organization. These date back to his days in the Sandinista guerrilla forces, which ousted the late president, Anastasio Somoza, in July 1979.